

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

August/September 2025



Prayer & Spirituality

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Prayer and Spirituality



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Volume 109 – Number 5 – August/September 2025

Columban Mission

PUBLISHED BY THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

COLUMBAN MISSION (Issn 0095-4438) is published eight times a year. A minimum donation of \$15 a year is required to receive a subscription. Send address and other contact information changes by calling our toll-free number, by sending the information to our mailing address or by emailing us at MISSIONOFFICE@COLUMBAN.ORG.

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The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.



In So Many Words

By Columban Missionaries

On Prayer and Spirituality

In the Catholic tradition, prayer and spirituality are at the very heart of our relationship with God. They are not peripheral practices but essential means through which we grow in holiness, respond to God's grace, and enter more deeply into the mystery of His love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Prayer is both personal and communal. It encompasses a wide range of expressions—vocal, meditative, and contemplative—as described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2721–2724). Whether it is the liturgical prayer of the Mass, the structured rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, or the silent contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament, prayer is how we unite ourselves to God and allow Him to work within us. The Rosary, devotions to the saints, and prayers of intercession are all cherished practices that help guide the faithful in lifting their hearts to the Lord.

Above all, the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of Catholic life (CCC 1324). In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we encounter Christ truly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—and are nourished by His grace. Participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, deepens our spiritual life and restores our union with God and the Church.

Catholic spirituality draws from a rich wellspring of traditions—Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, Ignatian, and others—each offering unique paths to holiness. Yet they share common foundations: a life of virtue, discernment of God's will, love of Scripture, and service to others. Spirituality, in this context, is the lived response to God's call, shaped by faith, hope, and charity. It moves us beyond ourselves toward communion with Christ and active love for our neighbors, especially the poor and marginalized.

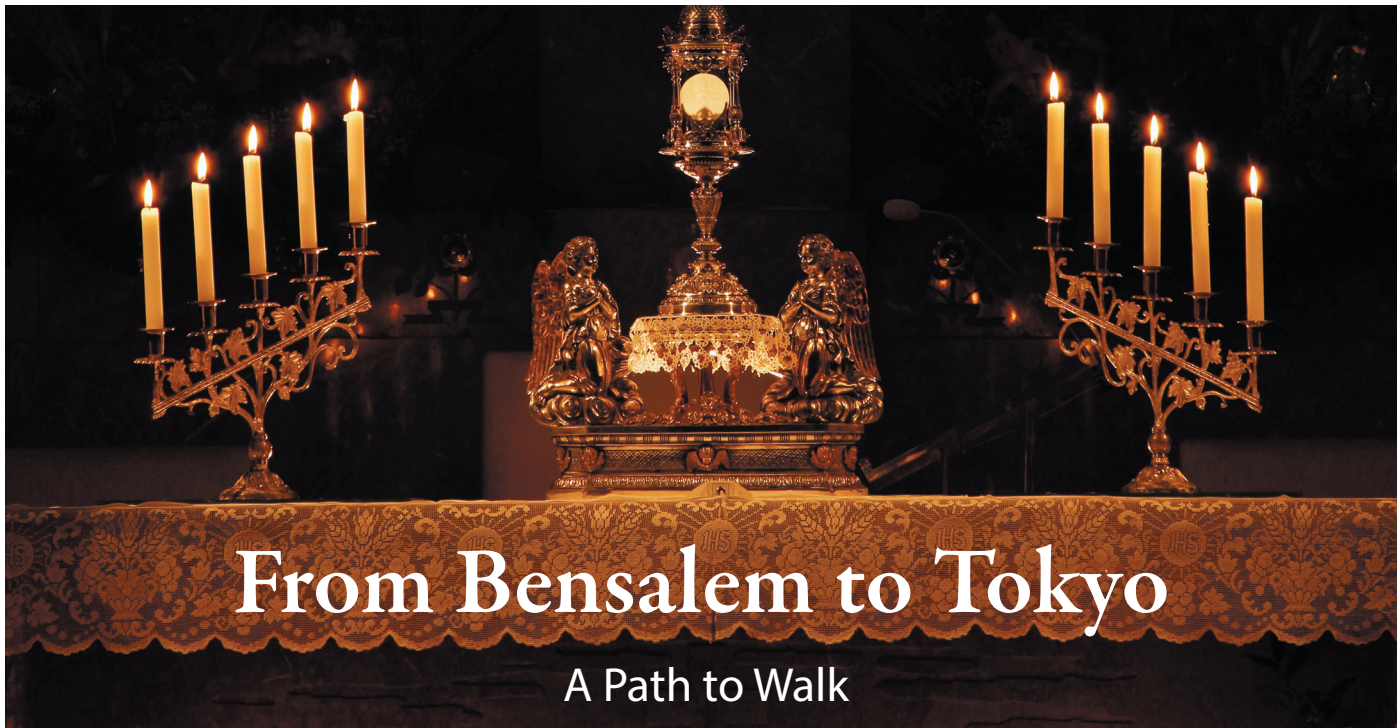
Spirituality, in this context, is the lived response to God's call, shaped by faith, hope, and charity. It moves us beyond ourselves toward communion with Christ and active love for our neighbors, especially the poor and marginalized.

Saints and mystics throughout the Church's history remind us that spiritual growth is not reserved for the few, but a vocation for all. Saints like Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Thérèse of Lisieux show us that intimacy with God is possible through prayer, humility, and trust in divine mercy.

In a world that often values efficiency and noise, prayer and spirituality invite us into a sacred stillness where God speaks to the heart. They are not escape from reality but a deeper engagement with it, seen through the eyes of faith. In prayer, we learn to see Christ in all things—and to become more fully who God created us to be.

Columban Missionaries





From Bensalem to Tokyo

A Path to Walk

By Fr. John Burger

“Priest of Jesus Christ celebrate this Holy Mass as if it were your first Mass, your last Mass, your only Mass.” This saying is on the vesting bench in the sacristy where I prepare for Mass. I suppose it is meant to stir up devotion and awe in the priest who reads it. In me it also produces a feeling of gratitude to God for all that He has done in my life.

I am Father John Burger of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, the Columban Fathers. I have been a priest for 52 years. I was born in 1946 in Philadelphia. I am the son and first child of John Jacob Burger and Frances Mary Burger. My parents were just getting engaged when Pearl Harbor happened, and my father immediately knew he would be drafted. They decided to wait until after the national emergency was over and did not get married until four months after V-J day.

My father’s great-grandfather came to Maryland from Switzerland sometime before 1851. His maternal grandfather, Leopold Hunsinger came to Philadelphia from Alsace in 1882. My father had four cousins who were

priests: Three of them were Holy Ghost Fathers: Frs. Francis Trotter, C.S.Sp.; Charles Trotter, C.S.Sp.; Leonard Trotter, C.S.Sp. The fourth was Fr. John Martin of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Sister Peter Faber (Mildred Trotter) of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia was also a first cousin of my dad.

My mother was born in Derry, Ireland, in 1913 and came to the U.S. with her family as an eleven-year-old in January 1925 on the Cameronia from Moville, Northern Ireland, to New York, arriving at Ellis Island. Two of my mother’s brothers also became Holy Ghost Fathers: William G. Marley, C.S.Sp., and Edward G. Marley, C.S.Sp. My Grandmother’s uncle was Cardinal Michael Logue of Armagh.

That’s a lot of priests in one family, I’d say! Why have I told you all that? Well, all that background, plus the fact that I attended Catholic School from first through twelfth grade, might have you thinking that my vocation has a certain inevitability. But I assure you that is not how it felt to me. My uncle,

“Father Bill” Marley, was the one I saw more of than any of the others. He was usually assigned somewhere on the East Coast between Rhode Island and Virginia. He even stayed at our house while recovering from a heart attack. It was good to have seen so many priests in informal situations. It humanized them in my eyes. The other Spiritans (Holy Ghost Fathers) spent a lot of their time overseas or assigned far from Philadelphia.

Our family home was in the Cornwells Heights section of Bensalem, walking distance from St. Charles Borromeo Church and School and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters Convent that we always referred to as Mother Katherine’s. This location meant that it was easy to get myself to Church and to Mother Katharine’s when I was scheduled to serve Mass.

Cornwells Heights was also home to the Holy Ghost Apostolic College, then the minor seminary for the Spiritans. In 1959, the order moved its College Seminary to the campus of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, and the Apostolic College began its

transformation into Holy Ghost Prep. That was the year before I graduated from Eighth grade, and I entered Holy Ghost Prep in its second year as a Prep school.

During my time at Holy Ghost, I started thinking about various professions. I read a book about the architect Frank Lloyd Wright and dreamed of designing buildings. In those years, I was not at all attracted to anything in the medical field. Our freshman religion textbook was called *Man's Search for Happiness*. Thinking about the various ways people strive for happiness captured my imagination. At some point, I thought perhaps of becoming a priest. I did some volunteering with one of my priest-teachers among the deaf patients at Byberry State Hospital. Nine of the 39 in my graduating class were seminarians. And I was friendly with some of them, but this presented me with a problem: if I went along with family tradition and joined the Holy Ghost Fathers, would I just be tagging along with them? Prolonging high school? How would I know if I were really testing my own vocation? I was not attracted to the prospect of spending all my life in a Philadelphia area parish or teaching in a Catholic high school.

What I did have was an interest in the Far East, and was impressed by the large populations of the countries of Asia. I had a pen pal in Japan, and I was reading books such as *Deliver Us from Evil* by Dr. Tom Dooley. Just at that time, another priest arrived—like Melchizedek—seemingly out of nowhere. A Columban priest who had known my mother's family when they were children in Ireland passed through Philadelphia in the summer of 1962. He was traveling across the States before returning to Ireland, having been assigned to Burma (now Myanmar) for 25 years. He had some

great stories. It was the first contact I had with any of the Columban Fathers. The following year I did a “come and see” weekend at their seminary in Milton, Massachusetts. The Holy Ghost priests were always very supportive of my pursuing my own vocation path. And in September 1964, I started at the Columban College Seminary in Wisconsin.


Vatican Council II was in session, but not much had changed by the Fall of 1964. By the time I was ordained in 1973, a great deal had changed. In one sense, I am glad I experienced the changes as they happened, but the 1960s and early 1970s were not an easy time. As someone described it, the essentials would not change, but non-essential things could change. The only problem was that there did not seem to be a consensus about what was “essential.” For the first three or four years of seminary, we were away from the world, surrounded by farmland.

Later, we continued to live at a Columban Seminary but commuted to the Boston Diocesan Seminary and had many opportunities for cross-registration to other theological schools in the Boston area. And I took advantage of many of these opportunities.

Toward the end of my seminary years, we were asked to write an essay about ourselves, our talents and interests and where we would like to be assigned overseas. In my essay, I mentioned that I would rather work with a small group of people that I got to know well rather than a large group with whom I had superficial contact. I have always suspected that those words sent me to Japan.

In the 52 years I have been a priest, I have worn many hats: foreign missionary, student priest, pastor, counselor, college lecturer, seminary rector, editor, superior, chaplain. I believe we learn academic theology in

the seminary, but that we learn how to be priests from our parishioners and other priests. I was in the priesthood for about five years before I had a sense of that. I followed a priest with long experience as a missionary in Japan and China. His were big shoes to fill. People looked to me for direction and leadership as they had turned to him. I had to combine the skills of listening keenly and preaching. I had to know when to speak up and lead and when to let the parish council build a consensus—something the Japanese are good at.

It was also in that parish that I realized the extent to which the Church is a beacon of hope for people on the fringes of Japanese Society. It may play into the Japanese prejudice that religion is only for the weak, but I feel proud that some troubled people have enough hope and trust in the Church to come calling at our doors with their problems. It is not that I stayed in the parish compound and waited for the town to beat a path to my door. I tried to be out in the neighborhood, letting myself be known. For example, I became acquainted with a barber who once gave me such a close shave that I was good for 48 hours, a teller at the bank, and other people around the town. This was another forte of my predecessor, who loved to joke with people. I am not sure his jokes always translated well, but I am convinced that the warmth of his humor did. I inherited his cordial relationship with elementary and junior high principals around the area. Years have passed since all this took place, but looking back, I still marvel at what that priest taught me by example, without his even being present, just giving me his path to walk in. 

Columban Fr. John Burger lives and works in Pennsylvania.

A Humble and Compassionate Caregiver

Providing Exceptional Care

By Febie Gonzales

When I asked, “Why did you choose to come to Taiwan?” Adi, an Indonesian caregiver, replied, “To earn money for my family, to provide for their needs and well-being, to send my children to school, and to have a decent life back in my home country.”

I’ve known and worked with Adi since 2018 at the Ai Jia Development Center. She is married and has three children who live in Indonesia. She has been in Taiwan for a full ten years without any home or local holiday, missing all the significant family events back home. After her first three years in Taiwan, she changed employers. When her second contract came to an end, the COVID pandemic hit. I witnessed her intense eagerness to go home. However, due to financial concerns and the health risks of traveling at that time, she decided to stay.

Adi looks after Mèimei, a student with physical and mental challenges who attends the center. Mèimei’s physical movements are limited as she sits in a wheelchair and struggles to speak. Adi’s work is much like caring for a baby; she even sleeps in the same room as Mèimei. Moreover, her responsibilities include household chores such as cleaning, shopping, and cooking. Fortunately, she is able to leave her employer’s house each day to take Mèimei to school.

Adi’s employer trusts and values her greatly, providing her with the salary she deserves and extra pay for her days off. Adi hasn’t been able to take a day off because no one is available to care for Mèimei, who is entirely reliant



Febie, left, and Adi

on her and constantly longs for Adi’s nurturing affection. I have noticed how Adi displays genuine, tender love and care for Mèimei. She loves Mèimei as if she were her own child. I have seen how patient and gentle she is in supporting one of our students—an invaluable and heroic service.

Adi is a cheerful woman with a big, generous heart. Her humility and helpful nature are well recognized at the center. Two years ago, she had to undergo surgery, which was a challenging time for her. After being discharged from the hospital, she gradually returned to work because she needed to. It was hard, as she had to lift and carry Mèimei, who is a bit heavy. It took a month or more before Adi fully recovered and brought Mèimei back to the center to attend classes.

Adi is a resilient woman. Amidst life’s challenges, I haven’t heard any

complaints from her. She continues to push on and works devotedly. She is a humble and compassionate caregiver who selflessly strives for a better life for her family and Mèimei.

Adi’s passion and dedication have inspired and influenced me to invest more love and value into my ministry at the center. In times when I feel tired, challenged, and unmotivated, I always remember Adi as a model of faithful service—a reliable worker. I am truly grateful to have met her. She has shown me the true life of a migrant worker—a caregiver who wholeheartedly provides exceptional care to her clients. May Allah bless and guide her always, reward all her good deeds, and fulfil her heart’s desires. CM

Columban lay missionary Febie Gonzales lives and works in Taiwan.



Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps people break the chains of addiction through Columban programs like the Rebirth Rehabilitation Center in Myanmar (formerly Burma).



Thanks to the generosity of the Columban donors we were able to complete and open the first residential center in the country for women suffering from addiction. In addition, the program provides vocational education training to help young men obtain jobs. We hope to expand this program and offer the men and women who come here a path productive employment and ongoing recovery.

By making a gift from your IRA, you can provide long-lasting support for the Missionary Society of St. Columban while enjoying financial benefits for yourself.

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For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.

A-Bombs

May There Be Peace

By Fr. Barry Cairns as told to Fr. John Burger

It has been 80 years since two atomic bombs were detonated, one over Hiroshima and one over Nagasaki, Japan. On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 AM, the first of these explosions occurred and an estimated 69,000 people died. Then, on August 9, at 11:02 AM the second explosion over Nagasaki killed 39,000 people.

At the epi-center, in 3000C-degree heat, human beings were incinerated alive. Of course, dying of burns is an excruciating way to die.

I came to Japan as a Columban priest-missionary in 1956, 69 years ago. I met A-bomb survivors, some of them suffering from radiation sickness. Their faces had an unhealthy yellow tinge. Some spoke of the guilt they still felt more than a decade after the war ended, for not answering the desperate cries for water of the more seriously wounded and dying.

I was asked by a survivor to offer Mass for some of his family members who died as a result of the bombing. At the prayer of the faithful, he read out the names of nineteen relatives. An estimated 10,000 Catholics died in Nagasaki. The city has been the center of the old Christians since St. Francis Xavier's time.

In recent decades, Japan has joined the prosperous countries of the world. And most people, Japanese included, have forgotten the desperate post-war conditions in the country. When I first came to Japan, the people were still much affected by the trauma of war and the death, destruction and poverty that had come in its wake. Poverty was prevalent, especially outside the big cities. In my first mission assignment, as an assistant pastor, in Chiba prefecture, each Friday I would distribute food and



clothing to the very poor. There were seven tuberculosis sanitariums in the area. Limbless former soldiers, dressed in white, begged for help outside the railway stations.


I went to Nagasaki and visited the Atomic Bomb Memorial Museum. The photos of burned victims were horrendous, of course. But what really touched me was a small child's tricycle, burnt and twisted. It personalized the destructiveness and lethality of ONE bomb. I left the museum sickened and indeed angry. In that turbulent mood, I walked a short distance to a small wooden hut. For three years after the war, Dr. Takashi Paul Nagai lived there with his two children. He later became bedridden with radiation sickness affecting his liver. From that tiny wooden hut Dr. Nagai campaigned for peace and reconciliation, not recrimination. Behind the Nagai's hut there is now a small, tasteful museum. Dr. Nagai's son Makoto, guided me through the exhibits.

In the Bomb Museum, it was that tricycle that touched me; here it was a tiny melted pile that had been a rosary. This rosary had so often been in the hands of Dr. Nagai's beloved wife, Midori. She had been killed instantly in the atomic blast. Accompanying this exhibit was a poignant sketch by Dr. Nagai himself, showing his wife going

to heaven on a mushroom-shaped atomic cloud. By the time I left that small museum, my anger had been replaced by hope. Thanks to Dr. Nagai, I felt and still feel motivated to be an instrument of Christ's peace.

All these years later, the number of atomic bomb survivors (hibakusha in Japanese) has dwindled to only a few. But these few have continued to raise their voices and were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2024.

In the interviews afterward, the survivor representatives emphasized that a nuclear bomb is radically different from a conventional bomb. Just one nuclear bomb kills a massive number of people indiscriminately. There is no distinction made between military targets and civilians. The International Peace Research Institute of Stockholm estimates that the nine nuclear-armed nations possess 12,121 nuclear weapons among them.

The prayerful plea of Doctor Nagai was: "May there be peace! Let Nagasaki be the last atomic bomb." 

Columban Father Barry Cairns is a New Zealander who is living in Japan and continuing his mission there. He says he is more effective as a missionary now than in his younger days. With St. Paul he says, "when I am weak, then I am strong." Columban Fr. John Burger lives and works in the U.S.

Open the Heart

開心

By r. George Da Roza

On January 18, 2025, twelve Columban missionaries representing different countries gathered in Hong Kong for a Columban Formation Committee meeting. We had a guest speaker from China, Sr. M., who spoke to the group of the joys and challenges as she journeyed to form a contemplative order in China. The following poem is based on her experiences. To protect Sr. M.'s identity, her name and location have been deliberately omitted.

Given the opportunity to study abroad,
she left her familiar surroundings for a land different from
hers.

New sounds, new sights, new faces, new culture.
Transitions are neither easy nor smooth
but faced with faith, she journeyed on.

Classes started and she found a community in which she
grew
in faith, friendship and love.

In the spirit of the Augustinians, she grew in grace and faith
undeterred by the struggles that faced her in and out of the
classroom.

She heard another call.

"Return home." It was a desire, but to do what.
To leave a community that was safe, loving, and welcoming
only to return to uncertainty, no community, no support:
Fear sets in and doubts creep into the soul.
"Be Not Afraid."

In prayer and consultation, she sought advice,
hearing the voice of God expressed via others
fear had no place in her life, "Love casts out all fear."
Certain of her call, she returns to the difficulties
that await her in China.

Landing first in Hong Kong greeted by a woman of faith
who hosts her stay
she ponders the steps needed to accomplish this call.
her first miracle received
the sharing of her story to this new friend
opens the heart and a gift presented.

Gift enough to buy land upon which to build the dream.
a bishop sympathetic to the dream, hope and faith
led to her second miracle.
The mission had begun and the problems followed.

Bureaucracy's complex system spins a web that entangles
every effort
New tactics are needed to go forth.

"Building for religious purposes not permitted,"
a simple county clerk reveals tactics
lead to her third miracle
"Apply for that which is permissible"
A chicken farm is born, not quite what was once imagined
But it is a beginning

Seasons change as do bureaucratic laws
chicken farm slowly evolves into a care facility for the
elderly
Acceptable by law and provides for the needs of a new
community
of women called to prayer and faith
her fourth miracle
more women now living out faith in sometimes difficult
circumstances;

Miracles continue:
They have found tactics to share their faith
often against strategies of governmental agencies
providing joy, fellowship, and faith in the strangest of
settings:
often restrained by systems, faith continues to grow
yet in lands of religious freedoms, churches go empty.

Inspired by the life of this one woman,
Our hearts opened to her joy, her peace and her strength in
God.

We understood more deeply the expression of the Chinese
characters:

開心 to open one's heart and that is a miracle! CM

Columban Fr. George DaRoza lives and works in the U.S.

Joy, Love, and Commitment

Tribal Ministry in Pakistan

By Mona Esteban



I have been reflecting on my experiences in the tribal ministry – among both the Parkari Kohlis and the Punjabis. Over the past five years, I have witnessed various approaches to life. I have even written a number of stories. These continual encounters have made me feel grateful

and blessed — truly a gift for those called to this vocation.

My arrival here in Pakistan wasn't particularly promising. It took a lot of observation and trial and error to understand how each group of people responded to the church. The challenges we faced were significant

battles that we had to confront together. However, ongoing visits and personal encounters have allowed me to become part of their life journey. In a sense, I have become one of them. The latest memorable encounter was with the Punjabi women. I was excited when they responded to our invitation one Sunday!

The women were pleased that a group was being formed for them, and they began sharing their faith in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our primary aim was to go house to house to pray the rosary. However, I soon realized that most of the women weren't familiar with how to pray the rosary. It took us a few meetings for everyone to grasp the process, but it went well. By the time we reached the fifth or sixth family that month, they knew it by heart.

Next, we wanted them to lead the rosary themselves. Unfortunately, I realized that only two or three of the women could read. They were open about their reading difficulties, which left me pondering what to do next. Eventually, Baji Mariam Saleem was chosen as their leader and took the initiative to lead the rosary from time to time.

As time went by, another mother approached me and asked to join the group. I was thrilled that they were coming forward and showing interest. Shortly after, one mother followed another, and soon four young girls expressed their desire to join us! Even at their young age and with their soft voices, they took part in leading the mysteries. What a wonderful movement of the Blessed Virgin!

I believe that the faith of these girls and women is being stirred and touched by the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the faith of these girls and women is being stirred and touched by the Holy Spirit. The dedication I see from them every week, as they go from house to house, is not constant but growing. Empowering them to lead a group has been a significant step, especially in this kind of society where women are suppressed and not allowed to share their talents. I am amazed at how the movement of the Holy Spirit continues to lead them.


Just like Mother Mary, who loves the church, these women embody her spirit. Their love and commitment to spreading joy by visiting every home and praying the rosary together have strengthened both their faith and that of the little girls who accompany them. Regardless of their commitments at home or work, their dedication and passion every Tuesday are unmatched.

On one occasion, we held the rosary at my place. Everyone was there, and I was delighted to have them. I am truly touched by how they are progressing and improving in their approach to the rosary. One woman led the prayers beautifully, offering intentions with each mystery. Listening to her prayers moved me, particularly when she prayed for me and my family. After the rosary, I struggled to find the right words to express my gratitude, but I thanked them sincerely from the bottom of my heart.

The power of prayer sustains me in my daily life, and it becomes even more powerful when we pray together as a community. I feel incredibly



blessed to be part of such a supportive group, especially when God's blessings come when we least expect them. I thank God for their dedication and faith in reaching out to other families in our parish. My ongoing prayer for them — and I encourage you to pray for them too — is that

they may always be as courageous as their patron, Mother Mary, and continue their mission to spread love throughout the communities in Badin. 

Columban lay missionary Mona Esteban lives and works in Pakistan.



Under the Narra Tree

Building Friendships

By Sr. Minerva Dangaran

In 2016, I spent three months studying at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. Located in the Occupied Territories, south of Jerusalem, it is possible to see Herod's Hill in the distance from Tantur. I recall the Palestinian workers who would sit along the Hebron Road near our school as they looked for jobs in road construction. Anyone who attempted to cross the border without a visa was subjected to a very difficult time by the police. Our school at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute was so peaceful and quiet in contrast to the Palestinian refugee camps we visited.

On my return to the Philippines, I attended a meeting of an interfaith forum. There I shared about the treatment of the Palestinians at the border crossing and what I had witnessed. The experience inspired me to try and live a life of presence in a Muslim community. The Columban Sisters had already accepted an invitation from Bishop Manny Cabajar of the Diocese of Pagadian to be a

religious presence in the Muslim community in Labangan, Zamboanga del Sur. I was assigned to this ministry.

My home was in a dilapidated state. Bishop Cabajar hired his own carpenters to fix up some of the broken bits while local parishioners helped me clean the house and the yard. However, the house was so old that all the cleaning and brushing just showed up its need for lots of repairs. Only a few days after the house appeared to be ready, the nipa roof started to leak! At night, with no light, I was frightened by the rats, who liked to eat the powdered nipa leaves. So, the beams and rafters had to be changed and galvanized sheets were used in the roof instead.

While the windows were well built, the frames needed to be changed. My teenage neighbor came to my rescue. His grandfather, a retired Imam, was a good carpenter and was looking for work. Should I trust him or not? Having mulled the question, I decided I needed to trust. I soon discovered



Columban missionaries Sr. Ashwena Apao (left) and Sr. Minerva Danganan (right) with friends in the Philippines.

that the elderly Imam was a quality furniture-maker and gradually, he not only repaired the window frames, but also the wooden staircase, the main door and my rattan chairs.

Soon after settling into life in the village, I understood that I was called not just to be a religious presence but also to try to establish friendly relationships with my neighbors. The caretaker of my house was Catholic, and the first visitors to the house were the caretaker's relatives and the children of the Subanen people who came from the mountain areas around the Lison Valley. They were at ease when visiting, but I was aware that no Muslim children were coming to visit.

Gradually, the Muslim children did start visiting. When they saw me working outside, they would usually come to help me sweep the ground around my place. Using a big box of drawing materials which Columban

Sr. Virgie had received from friends in the U.S., I encouraged them to draw, and I discovered that many of them were budding artists. I soon realized that this was a unique opportunity, so I asked them to teach me their language. One of them, who was seven years old at the time, proceeded to tell me I had to convert to Islam!

Older students frequently gathered in my house where they could use my computer and access the Wi-Fi connection, neither of which were available in their own homes. College students also came for tutorials. It was interesting to see the simple ways in which they showed respect for each other — if the Christian students arrived first, the Muslim children would not come and vice versa.

When I was called to another assignment and it came to the time to leave this area, I had grown in admiration and respect for the

Churches and other groups in the Diocese and surrounding area who were a constant support for the interfaith forum of Pagadian. My house had been surrounded by lots of mango trees of different varieties and huge Narra trees.

With its rich, reddish-brown colour, the Narra tree is highly prized for its use in furniture, carvings and construction. The Narra tree in the Philippines is frequently connected with strength and durability. During my time in Labangan, it was a source of encouragement to develop tenacity and perseverance while living in a community of both Christians and Muslims. CM

Sr. Minerva Danganan is from the Philippines. She has served on mission in Korea and, more recently, in her native Philippines, where she is now involved in projects focused on care for the Earth.

Those Crazy Columban Colliers

Inspiration Comes in Unlikely Ways

By Fr. John Boles

“When his family heard about this, they said... ‘he’s out of his mind.’” (Mk. 3:21)

It’s not surprising that many of Jesus’s contemporaries felt He was crazy. All that stuff about “love your enemy, give away your possessions, lay down your life for others,” etc., it must have sounded insane at the time. Yet,

these are the ideas that we Christians hold dear, and that Columban missionaries have long sought to put into practice. Who cares if many think our mission is “A Mad Thing to Do” (the tongue-in-cheek title of Columban Father Neil Collins’s 2017 book)? Yes. We Columbans are “crazy, for Christ” — and proud of it.

Just look at the story of the Collier family, natives of Clogherhead, Co. Louth in Ireland. Three of their members became Columban priests – Uncle Tony, Uncle Kieran and nephew Ray. And if that wasn’t enough, Ray had two aunts who became nuns – Auntie Rea with the Franciscans and Auntie Freda with the Enclosed Dominicans!

Columban Fr. Tony went to Korea in the 1930s, survived four years of Japanese internment during the Second World War, then – incredibly – agreed to return to Korea in 1950 despite the threat of another war. He refused to abandon his parishioners when hostilities finally broke out and, as a result, was executed by the invading Communist soldiers (so becoming the first recorded foreigner to die in the Korean War). It was four months before news of Fr. Tony’s fate reached Ireland.

Fr. Kieran served for over 30 years in the desperately poor Kachin state in the far north of Burma (now Myanmar), an area constantly riven by conflict between government and separatist forces. In due course, Burma’s military dictatorship imposed a restriction on foreign missionaries to the effect that, if they left the country, they wouldn’t be allowed back into the country. Like his brother Fr. Tony, Fr. Kieran refused to leave his flock and so stayed until the Columban missionaries were eventually forced to close the Burma mission altogether in 1978. Fr. Kieran died in Ireland in 1998. Later, Columban missionaries did return to Myanmar and continue working there today.

Many might regard the sacrifices of Frs. Tony and Kieran to have been

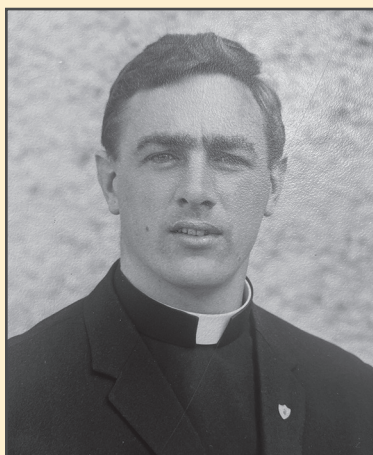


Fr. Ray at his uncle Tony’s grave outside Chunchon Cathedral in Korea during a visit in 2000.

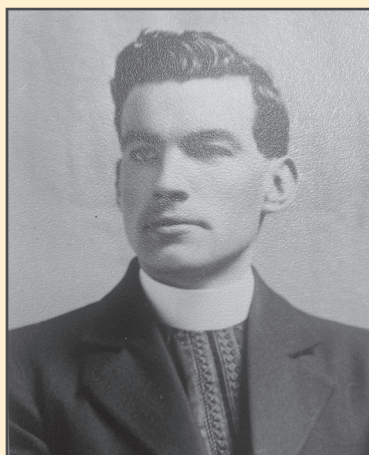
WERE UNCLES TONY AND KIERAN LOOKING AFTER RAY?

In 2010 Fr. Ray was returning from a visit to the United States when he suffered a massive heart attack and collapsed unconscious at London’s Heathrow Airport. By remarkable good fortune, a Japanese nurse (who was on a scholarship and living in London) just happened to be on the scene. She found that Fr. Ray had stopped breathing. She rendered emergency assistance and kept Ray alive until a defibrillator could be brought, thus saving his life. Later, she visited Ray in hospital. She told him that a companion had asked her to accompany her to the airport that day. The nurse had decided not to go, but seemed to hear a voice saying, “go to the airport.” She’d hesitated, but the voice had kept repeating, “go to the airport.” So, finally, she gave in and went.

Who knows, maybe Frs. Tony and Kieran were looking after Ray?



Fr. Raymond Collier



Fr. Anthony Collier



Fr. Kieran Collier

ridiculous, unnecessary. However, maybe God sees things differently!

As an interesting footnote, Frs. Tony and Kieran never met as priests. Fr. Tony was under internment in Korea at the time of his brother's ordination, and when Fr. Kieran managed to get back on leave to Ireland, Fr. Tony was already dead.

Fr. Ray was on mission in the Philippines from 1967 until 1978. He was based in the island of Mindanao, a territory plagued by unrest between Christian and Muslim communities. After ill health forced his withdrawal from the Philippines he came to Britain, where he chose to work in the inner-city areas, first, of London and then, of Birmingham. He lived out his vocation by reaching out to immigrant communities and helping foster understanding between groups from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

In fact, Fr. Ray is still at it, happy and active in his 80's and always stressing how much he's been inspired by the example of his uncles.

As a boy, he remembers them as being devout, warm-hearted and "down to earth." "Two things that influenced me were my uncles' dedication to daily prayer

and Eucharist, and their joyful commitment to their people."

"We all grew very fond of Tony when he was home on holiday in '49-'50. I loved the humanity of the man. For the family, he was always known as 'Tony', not 'Fr. Tony.' The same was true of Kieran. Tony was a quality Gaelic football player. He represented Louth many times." Although, Ray adds, "he had a problem of 'self-starting'. He needed a good thump before he would begin to play seriously!"

Did Fr. Tony's martyrdom influence Fr. Ray's faith and vocation?

"Initially, not much. But, as time went by, it planted a seed, an ideal, a desire within me to honor his memory." More and more Fr. Ray felt drawn to being a Columban priest who'd serve God by crossing boundaries of culture, nationality and faith. His father encouraged Fr. Ray but also helped him keep his feet firmly on the ground. "Dad said, 'be your own man, don't try to BE Tony.'"

Given that 2025 marks the 75th anniversary of the Columban Korean martyrs (plus the 80th anniversary of the Columban Malate martyrs, who died during the Battle of Manila in 1945) and that in this Jubilee Year we are called by Pope Francis to be

'Pilgrims of Hope,' how might the stories of people like Frs. Tony and Kieran be relevant today?

Fr. Ray feels that, since his uncles' time, the world and the Church have changed. "Back when I was ordained, we 'went out there' to spread the Gospel. Over time I began to see things in a different way. Now, people from 'there' are coming here — refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers — and they are running into rejection."

He goes on to explain that "this reality came home to me very strongly when I worked in the parish of Beckton, East London; on any given Sunday, people of anything between 40 and 50 different cultures and nationalities attended Mass. Today, our mission is just as much here, in our own countries, and it's to accept the stranger. We have to show everyone that 'difference' is a blessing, not a threat. This is a new understanding of mission. The challenge of mission is now here, in Europe."

Sounds crazy? Not to Fr. Ray, because it is the RIGHT SORT of craziness. It is the craziness of Pope Francis. It is the craziness of Christ. **CM**

Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.

David and Goliath

Strength, Courage and Faith

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala



“Wajau, do you remember me? I was in the minor seminary and you came to visit us one night. You talked about Pilemon. Then you taught us a song about Pilemon. Do you remember?” Sut Ja Naw asked me.

A few months after arriving in Myitkyina, I invited myself to visit the St. Columban Minor Seminary inside the church compound. About 50 to 60 young boys joined the night program, where I tried to speak in my limited Kachin, the language of the local people. Eight years ago, I met Sut

On their way back to the village, which is about 20-30 minutes out of the city, they were stopped by some men. Sut Ja Naw was forcibly taken from his father and was arrested to join the local ethnic armed group.

Ja Naw, who was probably 10 years old at that time. Just a few months ago, he came with his older brother to register and join the Positive Youth Development Certificate Program of our Center. In September last year, he became part of the Batch 4 students.

Sut Ja Naw went home to his village every Friday night to spend time with his family. On Sunday night, he came to the city with his father. Internet connection can only be accessed in internet shops that have satellite internet connections. He assisted his father, who does not know how to access the internet or use the phone.

On their way back to the village, which is about 20-30 minutes out of the city, they were stopped by some men. Sut Ja Naw was forcibly taken from his father and was arrested to join the local ethnic armed group.

The following day, his older brother and two older sisters came to the center to ask for help. They wanted to free their brother from the ethnic armed group.

Since the beginning of the conflict between the Burmese government and the Kachin Independent Organization and their army, every Kachin family has to give one family member to serve in the Kachin Independent Army. And in February 2024, the junta enacted a compulsory conscription law that took effect in April, which requires men and women aged 18-35 years old to serve the army. Since its enactment, hundreds of men and women were conscripted forcefully by the military army.

Many youth, especially young men including our center's staff and teachers, have since left the country to escape the recruitment. Very few young people volunteered and joined the army. This had led to many abduction cases and forced recruitment cases not only by the Burmese Army but also by certain ethnic army groups. In some cases families have to pay around 500,000 Myanmar kyats to groups of men in civilian clothes who abduct these young people who send them to different "training camps." These men will then be sent to the frontline.

An online news article mentioned that "The shadow National Unity Government, formed by pro-democrats ousted from power in the coup, says that 23,000 people have been conscripted against their will since the start of 2024."

Another online article reported on child soldiers. In a Frontier News

article, it was reported that the Burmese Army (Tatmadaw) has also allegedly recruited minors, with the United Nations documenting 112 cases last year. However, other armed groups, both aligned with the junta and opposing it, have also used child soldiers, defined as being younger than 18, with the UN documenting a total of 235 such cases.

One of those conscripted by the military was Ko Aung Kyaw, who was taken in Sagaing in October 2022, aged 16. He was threatened with imprisonment if he did not join the army. He trained for six months and was then sent to an active place of conflict. He was able to contact the opposing ethnic armed group and eventually escaped to Thailand.

Forcibly taken to become a soldier, David is now facing a "Goliath." The war is like Goliath to many young Davids — some driven by some form of love for their land and some not by their own will or choice.

I once attended a meeting of the priest council and the youth leaders. The main agenda was how to protect young people from getting conscripted by the law. The law has some exceptions, but the Church cannot protect all of our young people.

Sut Ja Naw attends our PYDP Batch 5. In our first class activity, he completed the identity wheel. He describes himself as honest and kind. He is the youngest of four siblings. In Kachin culture, names are based on their birth order (male and female). His Kachin full name is Sut Jat Naw. "Sut Jat" means "increase in wealth,"

and "Naw" means second in birth order among the sons. His favorite color is blue. His personal motto is "if you don't do anything, you won't get anything." Sut Ja Naw is also musically gifted. He loves music and playing the guitar.


A few days ago, there was intense fighting in Banmaw, a diocese where the first Columban missionaries to Burma lived. The Cathedral, the clergy house and the school were all burned. Many Kachins died in the fighting. There is now an even greater need for more young people to join the ethnic armed groups. I went to the local parish priest to ask for help and assurance that David would be fine. But he told me and David's older brother and sisters that it would be difficult to get him back at this time.

I felt helpless. I could not do anything. In every war, nobody really wins. Everyone loses.

As of now we do not know Sut Ja Naw's whereabouts. But I hope and pray he is safe. I hope God comforts him and looks after him. I cannot imagine the fear he must have.

Sut Ja Naw was baptized and given the name "David." Forcibly taken to become a soldier, David is now facing a "Goliath." The war is like Goliath to many young Davids — some driven by some form of love for their land and some not by their own will or choice.

And like David, I hope and pray God gives him the strength, courage and faith to fight this "battle."

April 4, 2025 update from Fr. Kurt: Sut Ja Naw was released yesterday. From what I've learned, they were checked medically and he was able to show the officers that he had medical issues, so they released him. Thank God. He is one of the few who were released. 

Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.



Program participants with their certificates

Rekindling “Care for the Earth”

Regenerative Agriculture Training

By Fr. Olivier McCrossan

A training on Regenerative Agriculture/soil regeneration was conducted and held at Living Soils Farm, Sitio Kakawan, Patrocenio, Claveria, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, February 22-23, 2025. The training was attended by no less than ten key leaders of organizations from different places in Mindanao. These key leaders have been engaged in various initiatives for the protection and care of the environment through agroecological, climate-resilient farming practices.

The training objective was to find new inspiration, to rekindle, and renew the interest of these key leaders who have been working, practicing, and promoting natural, organic, agriculture in rural areas; obtain the latest updates on the Philippine agricultural situation as well as updates on organic agroecological and soil regeneration practices; reflect and deepen understanding of the roles and functions of soil microorganisms in

sustaining agriculture; and its strategies for application and wider adoption of communities.

The participants were amazed at the whole training. It was held in a venue where one can see directly the living proof of what it preaches: healthy plants grown with the use of naturally produced indigenous microorganisms. Different plants such as corn, peanuts, tomato, string beans, sweet potato, and many more are grown healthy at Living Soils Farm, with the use and application of tailored-fit/made, science-based compost and bio-solutions. Farmers witness the actual soil transformation process for better yield and healthy plants. This method has been developed and enhanced by the Living Soils Farm led by Gerry Burdas, who recently studied Soil Food Web System in California, U. S.

The training navigates participants to the current and updated soil tools and materials, from simple tools like tie-wire to determine the compaction

of soils to sophisticated ones, like microscopes. Then the how-to and “why” aspects of regenerating, revitalizing, or healing the soil followed. The current agricultural context and situation were discussed by Bobby M. Pagusara, former Coordinator of MASIPAG-Mindanao and Agroecology Consultant of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund (Fastenaktion) projects in the Philippines, which serves as the rationale for why this training is relevant and important.

The participants realized that it all boils down to the basic premise, God created everything good and perfect. The soil is perfect. It has a complete and balanced ecosystem with beneficial and non-beneficial microbes such as bacteria, fungi, and nematodes, that live on by eating harmful bacteria, fungi, and nematodes thereby neutralizing or preventing bad microbes from causing sickness and diseases in plants.



Intensive listening

As a result of this process, the wastes or excretes, which include minerals/nutrients eaten by bacteria and fungi become the yummy food or available food nutrients for the plants, thus, making plants grow very well. Billions of beneficial bacteria-protozoa, fungus-mycelium, and nematodes are found in soils not sprayed/applied with synthetic agrochemical fertilizers and pesticides.


Each microbe or group of microbes must be connected to the other to perform this function or task. Different kinds of microbes and minerals should be together to produce the desired result, which is making minerals and nutrients available for plants and preventing bad microbes from harming or infecting the plants. This can happen only when they are together as a community. But agrochemicals disrupt this mutual and symbiotic functioning process because all microbes good and bad are destroyed or killed by synthetic

chemical fertilizers and pesticides. So natural organic farming is right, and it is the right way to manage agriculture.

Good soil is indicated by having many clusters of microbial communities bonded together, as observed by participants through the microscope during training. When organisms are in communion, good things happen. This is also the challenge to human organisms, the homo sapiens, we need to group ourselves and unite as universal clusters of communities under a common purpose of restoring the soil, of caring for the environment. We strive to do this in the best way possible following the most perfect model of communion: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The participants were highly inspired and motivated to continue doing organic farming and/or regenerative agroecological methods to help mitigate climate change, and

to care for the environment, the health and life of people, and the world. According to one of the participants, Greg Tacbas, who is a farmer leader and a local Church Lay minister:

“For me, the training is very reaffirming and extraordinary training I’ve ever attended. In the sense that it reconfirms, and provides sufficient proof of my previously gained knowledge in the field of sustainable/organic/DIFS (Diversified and Integrated farming System) agriculture. Because of this, I am so inspired to pursue and more motivated and aggressive towards agroecology. Thank you very much Fr. Oliver McCrossan and your friends for organizing/sponsoring/supporting this training, to our scientist resource person Sir Gerry Burdas and Bobby Pagusara, for coordinating/organizing this training.” 

Columban Fr. Oliver McCrossan provided this update.

Holiday at Home

Cherished Memories

By Naanise Pola Mo'unga

Since 2017, I have been living and working in Fiji. In December last year, I returned home to Tonga for my home vacation, intending to spend time with my elderly parents and siblings. Christmas Day created cherished memories while ensuring my parents felt loved and cared for in the comfort of my youngest brother's home.

A familiar energy hummed at my youngest brother's place, a symphony of creaking floorboards and laughter echoing in the air. It was my first Christmas home vacation where all nine siblings, now scattered across the country, except for one of my sisters who was in New Zealand, descended upon our youngest brother's house. Mum and Dad, their hair a little whiter and their steps a bit slower, were the anchors of this chaotic, loving gathering. We kicked off with a family lunch gathering on Christmas Day.

Before lunch, we surprised my parents, with each of my siblings wearing their family color for pictures together. After taking photos with each family, we sang, danced, and teased one another. My parents laughed until they cried, their joy infectious.

My siblings and I worked together in the kitchen, preparing our parents' favorite meals.

The aroma of homemade 'umu' from the underground oven, and the roasted pig filled the compound, and we all gathered around the dining table, sharing laughter and stories. My mum lit up as she recounted the funny mishaps from our childhood, and my dad chimed in with his



Naanise with her family

anecdotes, bringing back a wave of nostalgia.

This family holiday was not just a break from routine; it was a beautiful reminder of the importance of family, connection, and the joy of spending time together in peace and harmony.

I realized how much this time meant to all of us. It wasn't merely about the activities we participated in; it was about the bond we strengthened as a family. My parents felt cherished, and we all departed with our hearts full of love and wonderful memories, eagerly anticipating our next family gathering. The holiday at home brought us closer and reminded us of the simple joys in life. By the time the week ended, we felt rejuvenated, with hearts full of love and laughter.

Thanks to the online apps that keep us connected with family and

friends, I can engage with my family no matter where I am on mission. This is one of the best ways to stay in touch with our long-distance family members.

My brief time on home holiday allows me to rest, recharge, and renew my energy and focus. Spending time with my family and friends is emotionally refreshing and supports me in many ways. These connections give me a sense of belonging and encouragement as I prepare to return to my mission, and we make sure to pray for each other no matter where we are.

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:21 CM

Columban lay missionary Naanise Mo'Unga lives and works in Fiji.



Help Spread the Light of Christ with a Gift that Costs Nothing During Your Lifetime

You can show your personal compassion and set an example for others by remembering the Missionary Society of St. Columban in your will, trust or other planned gift. No gift has a more lasting impact.



Recently, a huge influx of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants have entered Chile. Columban parishes have always welcomed the immigrants and tried to provide some material help (school supplies, warm clothing, blankets, and more) for them. We hope to continue providing relief for those who come to this "land of dreams." However, we know that the most important gift we have to share with them is our faith in the Risen Lord.

A planned gift helps the Missionary Society of St. Columban continue God's mission in the poorest areas of the world. And, financially and prayerfully supporting the Missionary Society of St. Columban is an excellent way to participate in the missionary activity of the Church.

With thoughtful planning, you can choose which ways to support work best for you and your loved ones and make sure your gifts are made in a way that will maximize their total value while minimizing their after tax-cost. There are many planned giving options, including some you may not have considered before. Planned gifts provide a major impact in our missions, and we offer the following suggestions to aid selection of the best giving option for your stage of life.

- Donor Advised Fund Gifts
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The U.S. Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Regulations encourage charitable giving by allowing generous tax savings for individuals who make gifts in accordance with approved giving programs. A planned gift also offers you many potential advantages: the opportunity to increase spendable income, the elimination or reduction of capital gain taxes and possibly federal and state estate tax savings.

For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.

A Letter from Taiwan

Resilience and Faith

By Bae Sihyeon

I live with the Atayal community, who call me by my aboriginal name, MaHong. I serve in the eight churches which make up the parish nestled in the mountains of the Hsinchu diocese, Taiwan. As a member of the parish team my ministry includes celebrating Communion services, visiting parishioners in the hospital, facilitating youth activities, community gatherings and house prayers.

Most indigenous people make a living by growing various varieties of fruit such as persimmons and peaches and growing vegetables. In the past, roe deer, wild pigs, and flying squirrels were hunted and eaten as staple foods, but now the tradition of hunting continues only for recreation or special celebrations.

Sometimes I help the parishioners with their work to understand them better. In the beginning, it wasn't easy, and I felt anxious because I had no experience, but it was an excellent way to be with parishioners and get to know them.

Recently, I harvested oranges for the first time. We gathered very early in the morning and headed to the top of the mountain, where the slope was steep and narrow. When we reached there, we began picking oranges. Oranges are harvested from mid-November to mid-March. This is good for the people's livelihood because oranges are very popular and in demand during Lunar New Year.

Since it was my first time, I only took oranges from low-lying branches. I noticed how firmly each branch bore plentiful fruit, reminding me of the sturdy way these farmers, as parents, also care for their own children.

Looking at the parishioners, their families are like these oranges — the fruit are like their children, each varying in size and color, and yet all coming from the same tree. At that moment, I remembered the heart of God. How amazing it was for God to take care of each person, each piece of fruit. It became an enriching and meaningful time for me, harvesting oranges and feeling gratitude to God.

During our lunch break, we enjoyed a simple, yet delicious “bento” lunch box. After finishing our meal, I was surprised to see everyone heading in different directions. When I asked what we were to do next, one parishioner said, “MaHong, rest!” After watching them find shade and stretch out on paper boxes, I followed their lead and also laid down on the ground. The gentle breeze lulled me to sleep. In that moment, that same breeze made me aware of God's subtle presence.

After our naps, we went back to work. After harvesting, we packed the oranges in a well-organized group effort, wherein each person was assigned various tasks such as sorting, checking each orange, filling, and marking each box. Each task is important to keep the process going quickly. My part was to check that the oranges were separated by size. I had to keep pace with the rest while watching each take up their allotted task. It gave me great comfort and strength to share the joy and reward of our hard work together this way. Afterwards, we gathered to celebrate the day's work with snacks, drinks, and shared stories.

I learned about the parishioners' gratitude to God for the abundance of the harvest, humbly aware of how



much they relied on God for their livelihood. Being with the aborigines has enriched my life and taught me the importance of gratitude. They have experienced difficult times, like the fire that destroyed one of the churches a few years ago. We began finding ways to make rebuilding the church a reality. Now, six years later, we have only raised half of the funds, so we continue our efforts in fundraising, despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The community's resilience and constant faith is inspiring. Living with the aborigines, I have learnt about God's love for a neighbor who is sick, prayer for others in times of difficulties, and sharing our burdens. I appreciate how our meetings and farewells consist of the common Chinese Catholic greeting of praying to God to bless the other — “Tianzhu Baoyou” (May God bless you and protect you) - and the local Atayal greeting “Lokah” (Cheer up!). Through the lives of the parishioners, I can feel the living God and learn to practice love. For me, this is a significant gift from God, and it brings me joy and happiness as I continue living as a missionary. CM

Columban lay missionary Bae Sihyeon lives and works in Taiwan.

Prayer and Spirituality

Greetings to our Columban supporters once again. The theme for this month's magazine is "Prayer and Spirituality." Very profound and personal to all of us.

For many, "prayer" is a way of thinking about the prayers we "say." We pray the rosary. We have a whole handful of cards with a rubber band around them with prayers on the back, prayers to St. Joseph, to the Blessed Mother, to St. Jude, etc. We pray for healing for someone. We pray for safety for our children. We pray for reconciliation in stressed relationships. We pray for peace in the world and our own lives. We pray for eternal rest for the Pope. Some people are very good at praying for forgiveness for our sins. Some at giving thanks for so many blessings received. All of us are familiar with all of these forms of prayer. They are good and a blessing to do. These are the ways we learned to pray as children. And I am sure that our loving God is very happy to be sent all these prayers. God hears us and will answer us in a way and time that we might not expect.

All of these kinds of prayers are ways of letting God know our feelings and thoughts and desires and hopes. They are forms of communication with God. The spirituality behind them often is one where we see God as "up there" and us as "down here."

Of course, communication needs to be two-way. We're very good at saying our words to God. But often, we're slack when it comes to listening to God's response. I often tell people in confession who are

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig

busy and tense and unhappy to just sit in a comfortable chair, close their eyes, take a deep breath, and tell God or Jesus that I just want to rest with Him for a while and let him bless me. I want to be blessed with peace, with courage, with wisdom, with many things (but not a long list!). So often we're busy asking God for blessings, but we don't sit down and let God actually answer us. We need to shut up for a while! This takes some faith. We can be afraid that nothing will happen, or that something big will happen! It requires a different level



of spirituality. The prayer of silence is a prayer of faith. Don't be afraid.

We have just built a new church for St. Mary's in Fontana, California. We had to cut down an old walnut tree, over 100 years old, to make room for it. It had survived without any added water all those years in blistering heat, for months with no rain. In winter, scores of crows and ravens loved to come and break open and eat all those fallen walnuts. When we cut it down, I was determined to use the trunk and branches as much as I could for the altar, the cross, legs for the tabernacle. That tree became a symbol of the "tree of life" in my mind from the Book of Genesis. We also planted a big camphor

I am sure that our loving God is very happy to be sent all these prayers. God hears us and will answer us in a way and time that we might not expect.

tree in the plaza in front of the church, not a statue or fountain. My own spirituality is very connected with nature. It shows in this church building. I hope to leave it as a reminder that among the first gifts of God to us is the "TREE OF LIFE." I wonder if you might be able to see where your spirituality is expressed.

Many blessings to you. Peace. Fr. Al

Fr. Al

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Columban Mission magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with Our Savior as their guide and their eyes on God's Kingdom.

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*"Come after me, and I will make
you fishers of men."*
– Matthew 4:19

*At once they left their nets and
followed him.*

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